

First I want to thank Rep. Peter King for introducing this legislation and spearheading this effort on behalf of Jack Johnson and his legacy. I'm an original co-sponsor of H. Con. Res. 24, a bill that calls on the President to grant a pardon to Jack Johnson. I urge all fair-minded people to write or call their Congressperson and Senators asking them to support and become a co-sponsor of this legislation.

I am here to urge Congress to pass and the President to sign a pardon for Jack Johnson, the first African-American boxer to win the world heavyweight boxing title. His flamboyant behavior unfairly earned him the ire of many, leading to racially motivated allegations of illegal activity, a subsequent trial and conviction, and time in jail. In the name of all that is just, his criminal record should be expunged through the vehicle of a pardon.

After winning the title in 1908, Johnson beat all challengers in the ring. However, in 1912, federal authorities in Chicago pursued Johnson in the court. Charges were brought against him for violating the Mann Act, a law designed to fight prostitution by making it a crime to transport a woman across state lines for "immoral purposes." It was clear to observers, though, that the real intent of the charges was to punish Johnson for engaging in romantic relationships with white women.

After being found guilty, Johnson fled the country and lived in Europe as a fugitive for seven years. His boxing career effectively ruined, Johnson returned to the United States in 1920 to surrender and served one year in the federal prison in Leavenworth, Kansas. In 1946, Jack Johnson passed away in a car crash at the age of 68.

The false charges against Jack Johnson reflected an injustice faced by many African-Americans during much of the twentieth century. While we cannot change history, and Johnson's passing makes it impossible to ease his suffering, a pardon will reaffirm America's dedication to fairness and justice for all. We must pronounce, once and for all, that America does not stand for the unjust treatment of any citizen.